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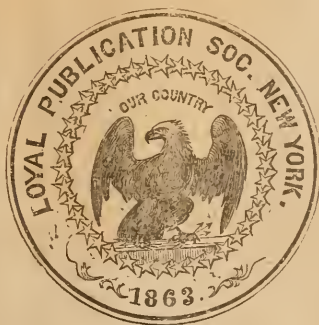
LETTER

OF

PETER COOPER

ON

SLAVE EMANCIPATION.



NEW YORK, JULY, 1863.

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LOYAL PUBLICATION SOCIETY.
NEW YORK.

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Resolved, That the object of this organization is, and shall be confined to the distribution of Journals and Documents of unquestionable and unconditional loyalty throughout the United States, and particularly in the Armies now engaged in the suppression of the Rebellion, and to counteract, as far as practicable, the efforts now being made by the enemies of the Government and the advocates of a disgraceful peace to circulate journals and documents of a disloyal character.

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LOYAL PUBLICATION SOCIETY,
863 BROADWAY.

No. 23.

LETTER OF PETER COOPER,

ON

SLAVE EMANCIPATION.

NEW YORK, January, 1862.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, *President of the United States :*

HONORED AND RESPECTED SIR,—The deplorable scenes through which our country is now passing form my only apology for venturing to send you a few lines, desiring, if possible, to strengthen the arm of Government by any and all means in my power.

The maintenance of our Union of States in all its integrity and completeness is, to my mind, the nation's pearl of great price, that can never be abandoned while there are life and power to preserve and defend it.

The grand question that now claims the united wisdom of the statesman, philosopher, and patriot, is how best to preserve and render more perfect this Union with the least possible expense of life and treasure.

The true statesman will always regulate his acts by the requirements of truth and justice. He will endeavor to keep in view the causes that produce the blessings we enjoy, and the evils we encounter.

To do this, he will gather wisdom by studying the course of human events, where pride and selfishness have strewed the course of time with all the wrecks and wretchedness whose frightful monuments still stand like beacon-lights in the pathway of nations, to warn us to beware lest a worse fate befall us. The experience of seventy years has taught me to believe that the evils brought on us by the folly and rashness of our Southern neighbors have resulted from the different circumstances of climate, birth, education, and the peculiar institutions with which they have been surrounded. So that if we had been born in exactly their circumstances and condition, we should have been as they; and if they had been born to all the circumstances and conditions that have surrounded us, they would have been as we—showing that it is the almost omnipotent power of circumstances that has made us to differ in our opinions, feelings, and interests—God having made us to differ not only in color, but in habits, capacity, and fitness for different countries, climates, and pursuits. It is the knowledge and application of this fact to life, that render obedience to the requirements of Christian charity possible, and cause it to be the greatest of all virtues, for the very reason that the exercise of charity is so constantly required to enable us to bear with the weakness and imperfections of each other.

It is a fact that the enslavement of human beings has so far infused its insidious poison into the very hearts of the Southern people, that they have come to believe and declare the evil of slavery to be a good, and to require the power of Government to be exerted to maintain, extend, and perpetuate an institution that enables thousands to sell their own children, to be enslaved, with all their posterity, into hopeless bondage.

It is terrible to know that the South is now waging war to strengthen this unnatural system. They demand for it stronger guarantees, additional protection; and some even demand the right to reopen the trade and importation of African slaves. This course on the part of the South, has compelled the people of the North to use the power of the nation to preserve, in all its integrity, the Constitution, and those laws made in compliance with it—laws which are quite as important for the South as the North, and absolutely necessary to avoid future wars, and

to secure peace and prosperity for all the States. This war has forced on the nation's government the duty to use the most effectual means possible to exterminate the vile heresy of secession, in order to restore the supremacy of the Constitution and the laws.

During the sessions of the last and preceding Congress, I ventured to recommend to Hon. John Sherman and other Republican members, that they should declare their intentions by some decided action calculated to force conviction on the Southern mind that the Republican party intended to secure to the South every equitable right which they could claim by virtue of any and all the obligations of the Constitution. I am fully of the opinion that the proposition of Mr. Adams to erect New Mexico into a State, and to repeal the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, should have been adopted, placing that measure of peace on its original foundation.

Such a course would have left the South without the shadow of excuse for the course that they have adopted. Such a policy would have strengthened the Union sentiment throughout the South to a degree that would have secured the Border States to the Union, and rendered it impossible for their desperate leaders to have made headway against them.

The question that now requires to be decided is, to adopt the plan best calculated to restore peace and prosperity to the nation.

It is now to be decided whether respect and obedience to the laws will more surely result from a continued manifestation of our determination to perform every obligation of the Constitution in a kind and liberal spirit, rather than rely entirely upon a display and application of force.

The evidence should be constantly kept before the people, showing that every use and application of force will be resorted to—not willingly, but of necessity—for our good as a nation, to secure the invaluable treasure bequeathed to us in trust for ourselves, our posterity, and the world.

In order that we of the North may perform our duty wisely and well, we cannot too often refer to the circumstances that attended the formation of the Constitution under which we live.

It had required the power and force of all the States united

to gain their independence of the mother country. To preserve that independence, it became absolutely necessary for the separate sovereign and independent States to yield up such specified portions of the sovereign power they possessed as would form a complete and perfect union in a constitutional government combining the strength and power of all the States, to be used to maintain the perfect union and government they had formed, for the purpose of facilitating commerce, and securing full protection to all the rights they had reserved.

In the original formation of that Constitution, it became absolutely necessary to make a compromise with that great and all-pervading interest which had then already entered into the very life-blood of the nation, rendering the formation of an union of States hopeless without such a compromise as would secure the return of that species of property held bound to labor to their owners. It should be borne in mind that we of the North did enter into a contract and agreement with that great interest, by which we (of the North) did secure a most valuable equivalent—one vitally important to regulate the commerce of a nation, and preserve internal peace and harmony for the whole country. These were advantages that were only possible to such an union of States as would combine the strength of all for the preservation and security of each individual and every State.

It is well for us to remember that the inheritance of slavery was forced on our fathers by the unyielding policy of the mother country; that it has grown into such a vast and formidable interest as to place it beyond the reach of all sudden and violent means or remedies. In the opinion of Silas Wright, it had become to the framers of the Constitution perfectly apparent that the very idea of a republican confederation of States must be abandoned, or this seeming difficulty must be encountered of organizing a free republican government with the existence of slavery in the States.

He then asks if such men as formed the Constitution could doubt what was their duty, and what choice they should make, when the existence of slavery was not to be affected any further than to secure an end to the inhuman practice of importing slaves.

Mr. Wright says the question was then to be settled whether we should tolerate domestic slavery, or continue the white race in endless subjection by entirely abandoning all efforts to organize a free republic, thereby making themselves the enduring objects of oppression, without securing any prospect of deliverance to the colored race.

And all this suffering to determine whether the black man shall earn his bread in this State or that one ; whether he shall obey a master bound by law and interest to provide for his wants, or whether he shall be mastered by circumstances that Mr. Jefferson declared will promptly extinguish his race, by the sufferings to which they must inevitably be subjected by living with a race with whom amalgamation would be a cruelty, to which Thomas Jefferson says no lover of his kind or country can innocently consent.

It is much to be regretted that the several States could not have been persuaded to abolish all laws which irritated the South, while doing nothing to alleviate the condition of slaves.

The several States should have been urged by every influence that Government could exert, to so amend their laws as to remove every appearance of bad faith as to a conformity with the requirements of the Constitution.

It is clearly the duty of all the free States to yield up fugitives from labor on demand, as our part of the obligations of the Constitution. This has been done in nearly all cases throughout the free States, notwithstanding the system of slavery is opposed to all the best feelings of our nature, and against the spirit and progress of the age.

The constitutional requirement to return fugitive slaves on their being demanded by Southern men, having been acknowledged and performed by the States, has been reaffirmed by an almost unanimous vote in Congress, with a request to the several States not only to repeal their personal liberty bills, but also to pass such an amendment to the Constitution as would put it out of the power of the North to interfere with the institutions of the South.

These honest efforts on the part of the North to maintain peace and friendship were met by a relentless war, waged for

the destruction of the Constitution and the dissolution of the Union.

This act of causeless war, committed by States now in open rebellion, has relieved our country and Government from all obligations to uphold or defend an institution so at war with natural justice and all the dearest rights of a common humanity.

The National Government is required, by the obligations of the Constitution, to execute the laws in such a manner as will most effectually promote the general welfare, establish justice, and secure domestic tranquillity, with the guarantee of a Republican form of Government to every State.

The faithful performance of this duty requires the Government to use all the means that God and nature has placed within our power to exterminate the heresy of secession, and thus remove a cause leading directly to anarchy and war.

To avoid such a calamity, we must preserve, maintain, and defend the Constitution and Union of States on the same principle that we would destroy a city to save a nation.

The strength, power, and progress of this rebellion make it necessary for the Government of our country to adopt the most certain and effectual means to bring this terrible war to an end.

It is now necessary to determine whether it is possible to overcome and hold an agricultural people, so great in number, occupying so large an extent of fertile country, while we allow their slave labor, on which they depend, to remain quiet and undisturbed in the production of the very means necessary to enable their rebellious Government to carry on a war for our destruction.

The continuance of this rebellion will soon satisfy every soldier and man of the North that the slave who cultivates the fields is as much a power to be met and overcome as the rebel armies that are now pointing the engines of death at the nation's liberties and life.

If I am not mistaken, the time has come when it is the duty of Congress to invoke every constitutional power of the Government to quell this rebellion, and throw the expenses of this war on the persons and property of all those found in arms against the Government, the Constitution, and the laws.

In order to show our determination to secure to the South all their rights, it should be proclaimed, in all kindness, from the highest authority of the nation, that the people of the north have no desire for conquest, and no thought of subjugation beyond what is made absolutely necessary to save our nation from being broken up and ruined by a combination of interested and designing men, whose business it has been to mislead and deceive their people.

This combination, formed as it is of ambitious men, by false representations has prevailed on their people to believe that we of the north were determined to make war on their institutions, in open violation of all the requirements of the Constitution.

So far from this being true, there was not one in a hundred of the people of the North who would, if they could, have interfered with the rights intended to be secured by the obligations of the Constitution. They were, as a body, determined to perform their part of the contract for the equivalent they had received, until fully absolved from an agreement that could only have been entered into and excused by the force of circumstances entirely beyond their control.

The time has now come when Southern men must know that the Union must be preserved, and it is for them to determine whether they will persevere in their rebellion until the North shall be compelled, in the most reluctant self defence, to render contraband of war the slaves and property of all persons found in arms against the laws and Government of the country.

It should be remembered by all, that slavery is in itself a perpetual war in its natural struggles for freedom, and that this struggle can never cease until men by nature choose slavery in preference to freedom, and until men actually prefer being forced, instead of performing free compensated labor.

The poet declared an unalterable truth when he said :

“ Man must soar ;
 An obstinate activity within,
 An unsuppressive spring will toss him up,
 In spite of fortune's load. Not kings alone—
 Each villager has his ambition, too.
 No sultan prouder than his fettered slave.
 Slaves build their little Babylons of straw,
 Echo the proud Assyrian in their hearts,

And cry, 'Behold the wonders of my might.'
 And why? Because immortal as their Lord;
 And souls immortal must forever heave
 At something great."

During all the past, when slavery was regarded as an evil entailed on the country by a power over which they had no control, it did not corrupt the heart of the people as it now does when a controlling power in the South has determined to make their system of slavery the very corner-stone of the American nation. This greatest of all national evils must not, cannot be allowed, while there is a power possible to maintain our Union of States—a Union that has given us seventy years of peace at home, with honor and respect throughout the world. The advice of Napoleon to a young American is appropriate to the present condition of our country. He said: "Cultivate union, or your empire will be like a colossus of gold—of gold fallen to the earth, broken in pieces, and a prey to foreign and domestic Saracens."

With profound and sincere respect,

I subscribe myself,

Your friend,

PETER COOPER.

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